

JUBILEE COLLEGE  
JUBILEE ILLINOIS  
PEORIA Co.

HABS. NO. ILL.-235

HABS

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*Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
DISTRICT NO. ILL.-2

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
EDGAR E. LUNDEEN - DISTRICT OFFICER  
CORN BELT BANK BUILDING - BLOOMINGTON ILL.

"JUBILEE COLLEGE"  
Jubilee, Peoria County, Illinois

Owner. State of Illinois; acquired by gift from  
Dr. George A. Zeller of Peoria, Illinois.

Date of Erection. 1839.

Architect. Designed by Philander Chase.

Builder. Supervised by Philander Chase.

Present Condition. The exterior portions of the building stand very much the same as originally built. The west wing, or dormitory wing is the second, and was built along the same lines as the original, which was destroyed by fire in 1857. Nothing has been found to determine if the original wing was built of stone similar to the existing chapel. The interior of the chapel and school portion was so arranged that all or part of the school room could be included in the chapel. This was made possible by two sets of sliding doors, made of walnut--the one set partitioning off the chapel proper, or "consecrated part," and the other dividing the school room in half. The pockets are shown on the drawings. The doors of the front set were two stories in height, so that when they were open the second floor became a gallery looking down into the chancel.

Originally, the greater part of the space in the west wing, on both floors, was divided into small compartments, each containing a double decked bed. A corridor extended the full length of the building from the stairs along the

east wall, servicing these dormitory rooms. The large front room on the first floor has always been the Library.

The building is in a very poor state of repair, many holes have allowed the rains to penetrate the interior and do much damage.

Number of Stories. Two.

Materials of Construction. The east chapel wing and central school section are of stratified local limestone in fairly level beds. The west wing is of local limestone hewn to level beds and faces. Interior floors were pine, plaster walls and ceilings in the most part, with wood ceilings in the chapel. White pine cornices and wood shingle roof. Rafters oak.

Other Existing Records.

"Bishop Chase's Reminiscences" - J. B. Dow, Boston, 1847.

"Forgotten History" - Peoria Star 1919-20, Mrs. Ernest Chamberlain, granddaughter of Bishop Chase.

"Bishop Chase and Jubilee College" - Rev. C. W. Leffingwell, D.D. Publication #10, Illinois State Historical Library, 1905.

Additional Data. "Fifteen miles northwest of Peoria, on a wooded bluff overlooking the beautiful valley of Kickapoo Creek, stands the quaint, rambling, stone building that once comprised the chapel, schoolroom, and dormitory of Jubilee College. For more than twenty years this venerable landmark has been unused and all but forgotten, while its vine-draped walls slowly mellowed to a soft, warm gray, and

the grounds lost much of their campus aspect and reverted to the wild, natural beauty of the surrounding countryside.

Jubilee College was one of the earliest educational enterprises, along the lines of higher learning, in the state. It had its beginnings within a few years after those of Shurtleff, Illinois, McKendree, and Knox Colleges. The Right Reverend Philander Chase was the first Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Illinois. Coming to this state in 1835 he found, so far as his Church was concerned, a field white unto harvest and but few laborers. There were at that time but four Episcopal clergymen in the state and, of course, no school where more could be trained.

Jubilee College, while primarily a theological seminary, had both collegiate and preparatory departments, as well as a school for young ladies. Although never large, it was for twenty years a strong and successful institution. Among its many students who went forth to fill places of usefulness and distinction in life were the Rev. Theodore N. Morrison, for many years rector of Trinity Church, Jacksonville; Dr. Thomas Dresser, long a prominent physician in Springfield; the Rev. Henry Neely, who became Bishop of Maine; James S. Ewing, who was to serve as Minister to Belgium; and Adlai E. Stevenson, who was Vice-President of the United States during the second Cleveland Administration.

No one cause can be made to account for the failure of Jubilee to survive. Obviously, the location was unfortunate. Bishop Chase was one of those early educators who

firmly believed that complete removal from the distractions and allurements of the city was essential to the best interests of youth. His conviction was admirably vindicated in the conduct and character of the Jubilee students, but the passing years brought to the college itself the inevitable results of inaccessibility.

The effects of the Civil War undoubtedly hastened the final abandonment. Bishop Chase had solicited and received much financial aid from the South, and at the time of the war many of the students were the sons and daughters of his Southern benefactors. It was only natural that most of these students, together with further aid, should be withdrawn.

In the Fall of 1838, Bishop Chase finally secured, at government land sales held in Quincy, two thousand five hundred acres of land lying adjacent to his farm. This land was not only extremely beautiful, but as a site for the new institution, possessed many advantages. There were both limestone and freestone on the grounds, clay for making brick, and wood for burning them; there were also "inexhaustible beds of the best bituminous coal," and there were several strong springs of pure water.

The location selected for the college buildings was the brow of a bluff commanding a view of several miles up and down the valley. "It looks to the south," wrote the Bishop enthusiastically to a friend, "and has a fine grove of trees which shield it from the north winds in the winter, and which, overshadowing the buildings, will make it pleasant

in the summer. What gratifies me is the buildings will be in full view of the Robin's Nest, (Philander Chase Farm) and about a mile off."

The chapel was the first building to be erected, and by the following spring all was ready for the laying of the cornerstone. The ceremony took place on the third of April--"the day fine," in the Bishop's words, "the sky serene, and just enough wind to remind us of the breath of God."

The original funds were soon exhausted--after the purchase of the land--by the erection of a few temporary buildings and the beginnings of the chapel. Work came to a standstill and prospects were gloomy. Then the Bishop thought only of his motto, "Jehovah Jireh--the Lord Will Provide." He made a long tour of the South and there, in spite of the financial stringency of the times, which held even the Southern planters in its grip, obtained many benefactions for Jubilee. Returning by way of the east, he received still other gifts, as well as additional funds from England--and the building of Jubilee College went forward.

By the fall of 1840 the chapel, and the schoolroom opening into it, had been completed. A small residence occupied by the Rev. Samuel Chase, who had personal charge of the school from first to last, stood near them. There was also a store, in which staple goods were sold for the benefit of the college; and a large, frame building, named "Jubilee Hall," but known down the years as "The Boarding House," was nearing completion.

The chapel, with Gothic windows and slender spire, (approximate design shown on drawings) was built of hewn native stone--its simple transepts and apse, together with the long schoolroom, forming the pattern of a cross. From the first, this little sanctuary under the trees served as parish church as well as college chapel.

The front room on the ground floor of the west wing was always the library--lined on all four sides with books. Many of the fifteen hundred volumes that were ranged here were old and rare, and bore upon their fly-leaves the personal inscriptions of their donors--such persons as Lord Bexley, Lord Kenyon, the Bishop of Durham, and the Bishop of Sodor and Man. In this room, too, in a special niche, were kept the several sets of handsome communion plate, one of which was the gift of the Dowager Countess of Rosse.

At the north end of this wing, also on the ground floor, was the post office. Bishop Chase was, himself, the postmaster, as he had been at the "Robin's Nest." For a long time the name was not changed, and many letters bearing the postmark "Robin's Nest, Ill., P. Chase, P.M." are still in existence.

The west wing and the chapel and schoolroom, together forming one L-shaped building, constituted the south and west sides of a quadrangle of stone buildings which the Bishop planned to erect--after the pattern of a seminary in St. Johnswood Road, London--for a "Christian Female Institute," in addition to a Jubilee College proper, in quite

other and larger buildings.

By 1842 Jubilee College was well under way. An announcement appended to the Convention Journal of this year set forth the information that in the preparatory department "all the branches of education usual in high schools" were offered. The young ladies' school presented "all the usual English branches, with the addition of the classics, if desired." Music lessons would also be given, if requested. This school was in charge of the Bishop's daughter, Mary Chase, and was conducted in "Jubilee Cottage," a large, brick building on the Square. After 1842 "The Cottage" was also the home of the Bishop's family, who assisted in the work of boarding the students.

Except for the little brick house at the gate, no trace of the buildings on the Square now remains. The names of these former cottages, "Windsor Cottage," "Shady-side," "Strawberry Cottage" and "Bleak House" are all quite reminiscent of the early settlement.

In 1931 the Jubilee property, so long unused for educational purposes, reverted to the heirs of Bishop Chase; and on July seventh of that year, the heirs having sued for partition, the remaining buildings and grounds--the latter now comprising only ninety-six acres--were sold at a Master-in-Chancery sale at the court house door in Peoria. By a pathetic coincidence the sale occurred exactly eighty-four years from the day on which the first commencement was held.



The purchaser was Dr. George A. Zeller, Managing Officer of the Peoria State Hospital. Interested in the preservation of historic sites, and having a reverence for the life and work of Philander Chase, this large-hearted physician wished not only to see the picturesque remains of Jubilee College rescued from further ruin, but to put the property to some use that would carry out the original purpose of the founder---the development of youth. Accordingly, to the great satisfaction of everyone interested, he presented it to the Boy Scouts of America, as a permanent camp site for the Scouts of the Creve Coeur Council of that organization. The chapel was reserved and, in special memory of Bishop Chase, presented to the parish of St. Paul's Church, Peoria.

But once again a worthy design failed of complete fulfillment. The Scout organization was unable to develop the property in accordance with the terms of the deed of trust, and early in 1934, the title was returned to the donor. Plans have been worked out by which, through the generosity of Doctor Zeller, the property has passed into the hands of the state, eventually to become, it is hoped, a State Park.

Visiting the campus today, one finds only two buildings that have stood since the Bishop's time--"Old Main," and the small brick gate-house, once the college store (although probably not the original one), and now the caretaker's lodge. The "Boarding House," which stood immediately north

of the main building, and from which a covered passage led to the small door still to be seen on the east side of the west wing, was torn down long ago; and the two or three log structures that stand about in various states of disrepair are relics only of the Raymond Riordan school for boys, which terminated a brief career in 1909.

But the restful beauty of the arching trees--many of which are oaks three centuries old--the shaded paths, the deep, wooded ravine on the north, the natural "oval lawn" sloping away in front of the main building, and the wide view stretching out beyond--these delighted the heart of Bishop Chase nearly a hundred years ago, and remain unchanged today.

To the old stone building itself, pathos inevitably clings. It is a lonely ruin, but one from which the dignity has not departed. Of simple architecture, its lines in themselves express tranquillity and repose. Beside its worn portal--some of whose stones are said to have been laid by the Bishop's own hands--stand tall, stately spruces. A great stillness surrounds the place. The continual sough of the wind in the trees seems less a sound than a quality of silence.

The dormitory would perhaps be habitable only in summer, and the schoolroom is a desolate place. The chapel, however, has been somewhat restored and set in order for occasional services held by the clergy of St. Paul's Church. The baptismal font is gone, and the sliding doors of beautiful, solid walnut. A small reed organ replaces the pipe organ

of other days. But although few, if any, of the original furnishings remain, the effect recalls a line from a letter written by Mrs. Chase to a friend in England when the college and its buildings were new--"It would do your heart good to look into Jubilee Chapel . . . everything plain, but very neat, and in good taste."

Reference: "Transactions of the  
Illinois State Historical  
Society 1934"  
Publication No. 41  
Lorene Martin, Author

(Approved)

Walter E. Lundeen

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